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NIO/EUR
19 August 1986TURKEY-GREECE-CYPRUS: CONTROVERSY OVER US MILITARY AID TO TURKEY

Greece and Turkey are lobbying hard over the DECA deadlock, and the heat is likely to increase this fall at the onset of talks with Greece over US basing rights.

Already Turkish Foreign Minister Halefoglu has cancelled his planned visit to the US -- evidently to protest the deep House cuts in US security assistance and to present a tougher government posture in the run-up to the September by-elections. The US debate over Turkish military assistance will be further complicated by new Greek Cypriot charges of a buildup of Turkish forces in northern Cyprus.

-- Last week, the director general of the Cypriot foreign affairs ministry delivered a strong protest to our charge in Nicosia, alleging a major buildup of Turkish military manpower in northern Cyprus and the "upgunning" of Turkish Cypriot tank forces with US-supplied equipment.

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The key bone of contention is the alleged replacement of M48 tanks with upgunned -- i.e., from 90 to 105mm -- M48A5 tanks among Turkish units in northern Cyprus. Turkish government responses to US queries have been equivocal, neither confirming nor denying the charges.

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Whatever the accuracy of the charges, they are certain to cause new political tensions. Heightened pressure on the Nicosia government after the recent border closure, as well as its need to divert the blame for Greek Cypriot opposition to the UNSYG's initiative, ensure that Kyprianou will dramatize the issue to embarrass the Turks.

-- The US visit of Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash, scheduled for mid-September, will provide another occasion for escalating polemics on the Cyprus issue.

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